

Dead tree falls and breaks chainsaw operator's forearm

What Happened?

An experienced chainsaw operator was struck by a falling dead tree.

The chainsaw operator has no recollection of the accident or of the moments leading up to it.

It is assumed that the dead tree inflicted a glancing blow to the side of his hard hat (the left ear defender was knocked off) the hard hat would have deflected his head away from the main impact, he was then knocked to the ground and pinned under the tree.

He suffered severe bruising to his left shoulder and fractures to his left forearm which required surgery.



Position of the chainsaw operator. He had just completed the directional/sink cut, seen at the base of the tree

The dead tree's exposed root shows that it was recently destabilised. It is assumed that it was damaged during the harvesting works and had become hung up in another tree or had begun to lean.

What was the cause?

The chainsaw operator either, failed to see the leaning or hung up dead tree, or failed to recognise the danger it posed.

What could have happened?

Statistics show that 10% of all chainsaw related fatalities are as the result of impact injuries from hung up trees or branches.

In the British Columbian forest industry they are called 'widowmakers' or less kindly, 'fool killers', the latter to try to shock forestry workers into always checking for them and when they identify them, to treat them with the seriousness they deserve.

There was poor mobile reception on the worksite. The chainsaw operator was working with a harvester operator who was away refuelling at the time of the accident. When he came back into the work area it took some time for him to see the chainsaw operator, 'out of the corner of his eye' waving at him from below the tree under which he was trapped. On-site communications should be 'fit for purpose', in areas where mobile reception is poor, consider the use of walkie-talkies, especially where chainsaw operators are involved. At the very least, chainsaw operators should carry a whistle.